

State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of Rick Tanasi, President
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SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools Education Committee March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members,

My name is Rick Tanasi and I am President of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A. SVFT represents over 1,200 exceptional professionals who teach in the Connecticut Technical High School System. Our members have the unique responsibility of providing students with a skilled trade and rigorous academic preparation for success in today's global economy.

In his "Race to the Top" initiative, President Barack Obama asked us all to reconsider the way we run our schools and thus help our students learn. Though not everyone may agree on the details of this initiative, we must all applaud its goal. Similarly, SB 379 is a much-needed attempt to help the Connecticut Technical High School System reconsider the way we organize our finances and our programs. For 100 years, the vocational-technical system has produced skilled workers who have greatly added to the economic life of our state. As a graduate of AI Prince Technical High School in Hartford, I know how a vocational technical education creates productive citizens. However, for too long, the political and financial systems in which we operate remain relics of a previous time. SB 379 is a necessary step toward running our system in a more modern, efficient way.

Senator Gaffey, at our last opportunity to appear before the committee, you expressed your frustration that neither the Board of Education nor the sub-board for the CTHSS reacted to the financial crisis that beset us at the start of the year. Both the legislature and our teachers become frustrated when we see appointed representatives allow serious problems in our system to go unaddressed. SB 379 subsection (a) addresses the need for two individuals with trade or technical experience to be incorporated into the State Board of Education. I believe this will have many positive affects in our future as an educational system. Looking at the current board members' terms we notice that none are due to expire until 2011 or 2013. With no vacancies, we respectfully ask how the changes SB 379 will occur?

The closing of JM Wright was an obvious example of the problem we have recently faced. It is not our intention to discuss the need to suspend JM Wright. However, the wisdom of section 1 in SB 379 is self-evident to anyone who has spoken to a

student who suddenly had to spend her senior year in a school 30 miles from her home, or a parent who is excited to see her child develop is interest in auto mechanics only to find that the opportunity was suddenly ending in June. The provisions in SB 379 should certainly help our system avoid another unfortunate travesty such as the one that occurred at JM Wright.

Section 3 of the bill is a welcome recognition of the inefficiencies and the political obstacles we face when we try to make our schools more responsive to the needs of our communities. A committee such as the one outlined in Section 3 would help ensure an active and responsible advisory committee that would effectuate our needs in a more open and transparent process. My only request is that a place be made on the advisory committee to represent the teachers and administrators within the schools. When a program's curriculum ceases to respond to the educational needs of our students and the economic needs of our communities, it is first evident to the people in the buildings. A voice on the committee that can discuss the actual practices in the building would well serve the goals and objectives of an advisory committee.

Section 3, subsection (b) discusses the need for the superintendent to submit "Information regarding the employment status of students who graduate from the regional vocational-technical school system". We hope that the language of this statement also recognizes the employment status of the graduates from our adult programs. We recently experienced the Department of Education suspending the LPN program while maintaining it is no longer part of the system's mission statement. If our system had submitted information that showed the 100% job placement rate, the Governor would have known the success of a program before making her decision. As such, we request you consider incorporating a graduate survey that would show the tremendous success of our dental hygienist, aviation mechanics, and our CNA adult programs. Graduate surveys can provide necessary data to evaluate the success of individual programs and trades, and as a part of official record can be consulted before any funding decisions for these programs are made.

Lastly, in regards to Section 3, which requests our superintendent to publicize the budge, we feel making the system's budgets available on the web could invite criticism and future problems from a public that is uniformed about our system.

As President of the SVFT, I am proud to represent the fine educators who work in our system. Our teachers have been resourceful and selfless as they seek to educate students while over and over being told they must do without. Ultimately, their success must be affected by the materials they are provided, the direction in which the system is moving, and the facilities in which they work. Bill 379 is a necessary move to help our system provide vocational and technical education to thousands of young people throughout the state. We applaud Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and the whole committee for bringing the goal of educational reform to our system.